Mass Violence Incidents and Social Media: A Guide to Hashtags

• Hashtags are typically created to provide support to survivors and communities affected by MVIs, grouping all social media posts using the tag in one location.

• Following an MVI, hashtags can also be used to spread unreliable and unverified rumors.

• Caution should be taken in viewing social media hashtags as reliable sources of information about the MVI.

• Hashtags can often extremely helpful in guiding MVI victims and survivors to support and assistance.

• There is no standardized process for creating and spreading social media hashtags.
  o For example, after the bombing at the Boston Marathon in April 2013, a number of hashtags quickly emerged to share information, to offer collective support to the city of Boston and MVI survivors, and to link people to longer-term support and services:
    • #BostonStrong
    • #PrayForBoston
    • #BostonHelp
    • #BostonResilience

• It’s helpful for MVI crisis responders to immediately create social media hashtags that can “trend” across multiple online platforms and provide timely and reliable information.
  o For example, as the Route 91 Harvest Festival mass shooting occurred, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department immediately published news and updates on social media:
    • #LVMPDnews
    • @Sheriff_LVMPD
  o These social media hashtags and handles then provided timely and accurate information about the MVI, warned people to stay away from the MVI site, and then provided information about victim/survivor assistance resources available at the Response Center and, later, the Family Assistance Center.